

SUBJECT: Audiology and speech-pathology licensing exemption

COMMITTEE: Human Services: favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 5 ayes--Barton, Vowell, Cooper, G. Luna, McKinney
1 nay--Clemons
3 absent--L. Evans, Guerrero, Wilson

WITNESSES: For--None

Against--Patricia Cole, Texas Speech, Language, Hearing Association

DIGEST: Under HB 326, persons with speech, voice, language, or hearing disorders who provided speech-language pathology or audiology services to persons with similar disorders would be exempt from licensing requirements for speech pathologists or audiologists. The exemption would apply only if the service was performed without compensation and the person providing it did not represent himself or herself as a licensed speech-language pathologist or audiologist.

SUPPORTERS SAY: People who suffer from a communication disorder should be able to help the similarly afflicted without running afoul of state licensing laws. But current law lists counseling among the professional duties of speech pathologists and audiologists, and this language has prompted some volunteer organizations to ask whether their volunteers must be licensed in order to continue counseling people with communication disorders. HB 326 makes it clear that such volunteer counseling may continue.

This bill would not infringe on the practice of speech pathology or audiology. Volunteer counseling is a service in addition to, not in place of, the services of speech pathologists or audiologists. Counseling from someone with the same problem offers hope and comfort that cannot be duplicated by even the most sensitive professional.

OPPONENTS SAY: This bill is too broad in its attempt to correct a minor problem. HB 326 would allow anyone with some sort of communication disorder to diagnose and treat a person with a similar disorder. What is needed is

OPPONENTS
SAY:
(continued)

simply a definition of counseling that distinguishes appropriate volunteer help from professional diagnosis and treatment. A provision requiring volunteers to work under the supervision of a licensed speech pathologist or audiologist would also greatly improve the bill. Support from people who have had to deal with a particular disorder is important in dealing with the disorder, but incompetent treatment can often make things worse. It can also be mistakenly regarded by a person in need of help as a substitute for professional services.